

Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative

Helping People Help the Land

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is adversely affecting the marshes and coastlands used by shorebirds, waterfowl, and other birds that will soon be traveling through the area on their annual migration south.

Under a new Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will work with farmers, ranchers and other landowners to manage portions of their land to enhance habitat for migrating birds. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) estimates that, depending on landowner interest, this effort will help to enhance habitat for migratory birds on over 100,000 acres.

The initiative includes portions of eight States: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas.

Summary of the Initiative

NRCS will improve habitat conditions and food sources for migratory birds likely to be impacted by the conditions in the Gulf of Mexico. This initiative will be delivered through two components (see details below): one component will be available on private agricultural lands and the second on Wetlands Reserve Program easement lands. NRCS will be working in cooperation with private landowners and other partners to establish habitat and food sources as well as improve the overall habitat management on participating lands.

NRCS will accept applications from June 28 to August 1, 2010.

Component 1

Agricultural Lands

Financial and technical assistance will be available to provide feeding, loafing and resting areas for migratory birds. NRCS will offer payment incentives to landowners willing to flood existing farmed wetlands, prior converted croplands, or other lands that



This Pectoral Sandpiper is a shorebird that occurs in this region during migration. This bird requires shallow water habitat to refuel during its annual migration between Arctic breeding grounds and wintering areas in central and southern South America.

*Photos: Stephen J. Dinsmore,
Iowa State University*

can provide immediate habitat for these species. Rice fields are particularly well suited for this initiative. Aquaculture farms (e.g., catfish and crayfish) that have been abandoned or that could be modified or managed to provide additional habitat are also a focus, because they can easily be flooded and manipulated.

Habitat Priority Areas

Participating States have identified priority counties using aquaculture and rice field data, with the main focus being within the Mississippi Alluvial Valley and the Chenier Plain in Louisiana and Texas.

Component 2

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Easement Land

NRCS will offer technical and financial assistance to landowners who are subject to a WRP easement held by NRCS and who are interested in participating in the initiative. NRCS will focus on providing food, habitat, and management practices most appropriate for species likely to be significantly impacted by the oil spill and appropriate for the target area.

Habitat Priority Areas

States have developed priority areas based on an inventory of WRP easement lands in the region where moist soil management plans could be most beneficial. NRCS State Conservationists will determine whether plans within their States will be implemented through cooperative agreements with partners, contracts with landowners, Federal contracts, or combinations of these instruments.

More Information

For more information and updates about the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative, visit www.usda.gov or www.nrcs.usda.gov or contact the NRCS State Office in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, or Texas.